

General Information

This pamphlet contains information about some of the benefits offered through the VDSS, along with information about your rights and responsibilities. This pamphlet addresses the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medical Assistance Programs and Energy Assistance Program.

How to Apply for Assistance

- Complete an application
 - Apply online for benefits at <https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/>;
 - Pick up an application any time during office hours at your local department of social services (LDSS);
 - Ask the LDSS to mail an application to you; or
 - Print a copy of the application and fill it in off the internet at: <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/forms/index.html>.
- File the application
 - Apply online for benefits at <https://commonhelp.virginia.gov/access/>;
 - Leave the application at the LDSS; or
 - Mail or fax the application to your LDSS.
- Depending on the type of assistance you are requesting, you may need to be interviewed.

Time Standards

Action must generally be taken on applications:

- within 10 work days for Medical Assistance for a pregnant woman;
- within 45 days of application for Medical Assistance (may take up to 90 days if a disability determination is needed);
- within 30 days of application for TANF;
- within 30 days of application for SNAP benefits (7 days if you qualify for emergency service);
- as soon as possible but no later than the last day designated for processing for Fuel Assistance;
- within three working days of all information being received for Crisis Assistance;
- by the close of the application period for Cooling Assistance.

General Eligibility Requirements

- To be eligible for most programs, you must:
 - Live in Virginia;
 - Be a U.S. citizen or meet certain requirements if you are an immigrant;
 - Apply at the agency that serves the city or county where you live;
 - Meet specific requirements of each program for which you are applying;
 - Apply for other benefits that you may be entitled to receive, such as Social Security, Worker’s or Unemployment Compensation.
- Before we can determine if you are eligible, some of the information you give must be verified. See the VERIFICATION section of this pamphlet for more information
- Depending on the program, eligibility and the amount of benefits may be based on:
 - Your income;
 - The number of people in the family;
 - Resources; and
 - Certain household expenses.
- As soon as a decision about your application is made, we will send you a written notice. This notice will tell you if you are eligible and the amount of benefits you may receive.

Confidentiality

Information you provide is confidential. We will only give information to someone directly connected with administering or enforcing provisions of the programs for which you applied, other federal assistance programs, or programs that assist low income individuals. Information may also be disclosed to:

- Law enforcement officials who are investigating program violations or, in some instances, law enforcement officials who are investigating persons fleeing prosecution or punishment for a felony.
- The Child Support Enforcement Program to help locate absent parents.
- Persons connected with verifying status of immigrants.
- Agencies that provide employment-related services for TANF recipients or to local school divisions for school age children who get TANF benefits.

Verification

Each program has its own verification requirements. You must provide any information requested to establish your eligibility. Your worker will tell you what you need to provide and the deadline to provide it. Please ask for assistance if you need help. Examples of items the agency may need to verify and some suggested ways you may verify the items include:

Identity, Residence

- Driver’s license, alien registration card, voter’s registration card, work or school ID, library card, and birth certificates;
- Social Security Numbers for everyone for whom you are requesting assistance.

Expenses

- Lease or mortgage agreement, rent receipts;
- Most recent utility and phone bills;
- Bills for the care of children, or elderly or disabled adults;
- Bills for medical expenses;
- Child support obligations paid by a member of the household.

Resources

- Most recent statements for bank accounts such as checking and savings accounts;
- Proof of stocks and bonds;
- Information about burial trusts, burial arrangements, and burial plots;
- Registration or title for all motor vehicles;
- Medical insurance policies or medical cards;
- Life insurance policies that may be cashed.

Income

- Pay stubs or pay envelopes for this month and last month for everyone working;
- Records of tips, bonuses, or commissions;
- Divorce decrees or support orders;
- Award letters or notices.

Rights and Responsibilities

- You must give correct information.
- You must cooperate.
- You must report changes that occur in your situation. Your worker will explain what needs to be reported.
- You may appeal decisions or actions if you are dissatisfied.
- You may review your case record during the agency’s business hours.
- You may review program regulations and manuals during the agency’s normal business hours. Manuals are also available online at www.dss.virginia.gov.

Authorized Representative

If you would like someone else to act on your behalf, you may select a trusted friend, relative or neighbor to be your representative. The representative may:

- Apply for benefits for you.
- Receive your notices and correspondence.
- Use benefits on your behalf.

You may name a representative on the application form. If you want to name an authorized representative at any time after you have submitted your application, write a note for that person to take to the local social services department. In the note:

- List the name, address and phone number of the person you are naming;
- List the duties you want that person to perform;
- Sign and date the note.

Nondiscrimination

DSS will provide benefits and services without regard to race, color, national origin, disability, sex, age, political beliefs, religion, sexual orientation, marital or family status. If you believe you have been discriminated against, you may file a written complaint with state or federal agencies.

If you have a disability or if you have difficulty with English, you may get extra help to make sure you get the assistance or services you need.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides temporary financial assistance to eligible families with children. To be eligible, a family must be financially needy and must meet certain other requirements. An eligible child must be under age 18, or if 18, expected to graduate from high school before age 19; going to school regularly if he is between the ages of 5 and 18; living with a parent or other relative; and a citizen of the U. S. or an eligible immigrant.

An applicant must cooperate in naming the parents of all eligible children and must help establish paternity for each child. The Division of Child Support Enforcement (DCSE) will send all support collected for this child directly to the family. A child will not be eligible if born to or adopted by a TANF recipient more than 10 months after an applicant begins receiving TANF.

The amount of the TANF check is based on the size of the family. A family may still be eligible to receive TANF while receiving money from other sources.

If you receive TANF, you may be required to participate in the Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) program. Families in the VIEW program may earn income and receive a TANF check. However, the total income cannot be more than the federal poverty level for the family size.

A family with someone in VIEW may receive TANF for no longer than 24 months followed by a period of 24 months ineligibility. A family may receive TANF no more than a total of 60 months in a lifetime.

Additional information regarding the TANF program, application, forms and manual is available at www.dss.virginia.gov.

Medical Assistance Programs—Medicaid, FAMIS Plus, and FAMIS (Family Access to Medical Insurance Security Plan)

Medicaid and the Family Access to Medical Insurance Security Plan (FAMIS) are Medical Assistance programs that make direct payments to health care service providers for eligible individuals and families who are unable to pay for needed medical services. Medicaid for children is called FAMIS Plus.

To be eligible for Medicaid, a person must have income and resources (assets) within specified limits and must be in one of the groups covered by Medicaid. Medicaid covered groups include children under age 19 years, pregnant women, parents with dependent children under age 18 years living in the home, adults age 65 years and older, blind individuals, and individuals who are disabled according to the standards adopted by the Social Security Administration.

FAMIS, and its program for pregnant women, FAMIS MOMS, covers uninsured children under age 19 years and pregnant women, with income that is too high for FAMIS Plus/Medicaid but is under the income limit for FAMIS/FAMIS MOMS.

Medicaid/FAMIS Plus and FAMIS have different income limits and nonfinancial requirements. When someone applies for Medical Assistance, the eligibility worker will determine if the person is eligible for either program. Medicaid and FAMIS pay for a variety of medical services, including prescription drugs, doctor visits, nursing facility care and hospital care.

Information about Medicaid/ FAMIS Plus is available online from the Virginia Department of Social Services at www.dss.virginia.gov and from the Department of Medical Assistance Services at www.dmas.virginia.gov.

For more information about FAMIS, please contact the local department of social services or call 1-866-87FAMIS. Information about FAMIS is also available online at www.famis.org.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—formerly the Food Stamp Program

SNAP benefits will help you buy nutritious food for your household. You may also buy seeds or plants to grow your own food.

You may not use SNAP benefits to:

- Buy alcoholic beverages, tobacco, soap, paper products, or other nonfood items;
- Buy hot food ready to be eaten on the store premises.

SNAP benefits are issued electronically to eligible households. You will get a card that is similar to a credit or debit card to use at the authorized retailers to buy food. You must select a Personal Identification Number (PIN) and use that PIN when you swipe the card at the store. SNAP benefits will be added to your account at the beginning of every month you are approved for benefits.

Additional information about SNAP benefits is available at www.dss.virginia.gov.

Energy Assistance Program (EAP) - EAP consists of three components: Fuel Assistance, Crisis Assistance, and Cooling Assistance.

Fuel Assistance assists low-income, eligible households by supplementing home energy costs. Applications are accepted the second Tuesday in October through the second Friday in November.

Crisis Assistance assists low-income households with energy related emergencies. Applications are accepted November 1st through March 15th. Cooling Assistance assists households in acquiring or repairing cooling equipment and/or payment of electric bills to operate cooling equipment. Applications are accepted June 15th through August 15th.

Additional information about the EAP is available at www.dss.virginia.gov



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Benefit Programs

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) is an equal opportunity provider.